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AMCONSUL SHENYANG POUCH
AMCONSUL CHENGDU POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIJING 32611

DEPT PASS USTR FOR WABNETT

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PINR, ECON, PGOV, CH
SUBJECT: STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN BEIJING DRAW TO A
-- HALT

REFS: A) BEIJING 32577, B) SHANGHAI 8230, C) SHANGHAI
8097

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: BEIJING HAS EXPERIENCED ONLY A FRACTION
OF THE TUMULT FELT BY UNIVERSITIES IN SHANGHAI AND
OTHER CENTRAL CHINESE CITIES. THERE HAVE BEEN A
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NUMBER OF DEMONSTRATIONS AT BEIJING COLLEGES AND
INSTITUTES, BUT MOST HAVE BEEN SMALL AND OUT OF PUBLIC
VIEW. THE LARGEST, A MARCH BY SEVERAL THOUSAND QINGHUA
AND BEIJING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON DECEMBER 23, ENDED
WITHOUT INCIDENT. BEIJING AUTHORITIES HANDLED THE
DEMONSTRATIONS WITH SOPHISTICATION, TOLERATING SOME
DISSENT BUT TAKING EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO KEEP THEM FROM
GETTING OUT OF HAND.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ROBERT J. MARTENS

DATE/CASE ID: 27 NOV 1998 199502887

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3. BEIJING STUDENTS DEMONSTRATED IN SUPPORT OF THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN SHANGHAI AND ELSEWHERE, DEMANDING GREATER DEMOCRACY, PLURALISM IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS, AND WESTERNIZATION. ACCORDING TO STUDENTS INTERVIEWED AT BEIJING UNIVERSITY, STUDENTS ARE UNHAPPY WITH THE FAILURE OF MIDDLE-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS TO IMPLEMENT REFORM POLICIES. HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR MORE RAPID POLITICAL CHANGE AND A STIFLED YEARNING FOR A MORE WESTERNIZED POLITICAL SYSTEM ADD TO THEIR FRUSTRATION. THE LEADERSHIP'S ABILITY TO HANDLE THESE PROBLEMS WITHOUT FURTHER ALIENATING YOUNG INTELLECTUALS WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE OVER THE LONG-TERM, IN MAKING THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF INTELLECTUALS IN REFORM. END SUMMARY.

BEIJING UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE TO SHANGHAI DEMONSTRATIONS

4. ACCORDING TO BEIJING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND FOREIGN EXPERTS INTERVIEWED BY EMBOFF AT THE BEIJING UNIVERSITY CAMPUS ON DECEMBER 24, BEIJING COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES HAVE EXPERIENCED ONLY A FRACTION OF THE TUMULT PRECIPITATED BY THEIR CENTRAL CHINA COUNTERPARTS. WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF DEMONSTRATIONS BY BEIJING COLLEGES AND INSTITUTES, MOST HAVE BEEN SMALL-
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SCALE AND CONFINED WITHIN INSTITUTIONAL WALLS. THE LARGEST DEMONSTRATION TO DATE, AND THE ONLY ONE WE KNOW OF THAT SPILLED OVER INTO THE STREETS, TOOK PLACE ON THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 23. SEVERAL THOUSAND STUDENTS, ACCORDING TO ONE PARTICIPANT, MARCHED PEACEFULLY FROM QINGHUA UNIVERSITY TO BEIJING UNIVERSITY AND ONTO PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY. THE MARCH FIZZLED THERE WHEN LOCKED GATES, LACK OF STUDENT INTEREST, AND THE LATE HOUR CONVINCED THE MARCHERS TO RETURN HOME. A HANDFUL OF TRAFFIC POLICEMEN MONITORED THE MARCH, BUT TOOK NO ACTION TO PREVENT IT OR TO HARASS THE DEMONSTRATORS.

5. ACCORDING TO A STUDENT PARTICIPANT, THE DEMONSTRATION BEGAN AFTER A FRACAS AT QINGHUA UNIVERSITY--INVOLVING A FIGHT BETWEEN OUT-OF-TOWN AGITATORS AND LOCAL CONSERVATIVE STUDENTS--ATTRACTED CROWDS OF RADICAL STUDENTS AND ESCALATED INTO DEMANDS FOR GREATER DEMOCRACY "HUMAN RIGHTS," AND SOLUTION OF STUDENT GRIEVANCES. THE PRINCIPLE RATIONALE FOR THE DEMONSTRATION, ACCORDING TO SEVERAL STUDENTS, WAS TO EXPRESS SOLIDARITY FOR THE GRIEVANCES OF SHANGHAI STUDENTS. UNLIKE LAST YEAR'S ANTI-JAPANESE DEMONSTRATIONS, IN WHICH BEIJING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOOK THE LEAD, THIS WEEK'S BEIJING CAMPUS DISTURBANCES WERE LARGELY SPONTANEOUS AND REACTIVE. STUDENTS FIRST LEARNED OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN CENTRAL

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CHINESE CITIES FROM STUDENTS UP FROM THOSE AREAS, AND
VOICE OF AMERICA BROADCASTS. THEIR EXPRESSIONS OF SUP-
PORT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN LARGELY UNPLANNED.

WALL POSTERS

6. ACCOMPANIED BY CHINESE STUDENTS, EMBOFF TOURED THE
BEIJING UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, BUT FOUND NO FRESH WALL

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POSTERS. A STUDENT TOLD EMBOFF THAT WALL POSTERS ON SENSITIVE SUBJECTS HAVE BEEN TAKEN DOWN ALMOST AS FAST AS THEY ARE PUT UP. INSTEAD, AS EMBOFF OBSERVED, CAMPUS AUTHORITIES AND THEIR STUDENT ALLIES ARE REPLACING POLITICALLY SENSITIVE WALL POSTERS WITH ANODYNE PROCLAMATIONS ABOUT STUDENT ELECTIONS, SPIRITUAL CIVILIZATION AND CHRISTMAS DANCES. NONETHELESS, STUDENTS AND FOREIGN EXPERTS SAID THAT WALL POSTERS CALLING FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, CREATION OF A MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY

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GREATER PERSONAL LIBERTIES, FREE SEX, AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT POOR TREATMENT OF INTELLECTUALS ALL HAVE BEEN POSTED OVER THE PAST WEEKS. A LONG-TIME RESIDENT

SAID THAT STUDENTS RECENTLY PUT UP A SERIES OF POSTERS EXTOLLING ADOPTION OF WESTERN INSTITUTIONS AND CALLING FOR WHOLESALE WESTERNIZATION. ONE PARTICULARLY STRIKING EXAMPLE IS A POSTER CALLING FOR SUBSTITUTION OF WESTERN POLITICAL PRECEPTS AS THE BASIS FOR CHINESE DEVELOPMENT.

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7. (COMMENT: THE POSTER IN QUESTION, WHICH THE FOREIGN PROFESSOR SAID REFLECTED THE OUTCOME OF HEATED DEBATES AMONG STUDENTS RECENTLY, IS A STUNNING REVERSAL OF THE 19TH CENTURY CHINESE REFORMERS' CRY FOR LIMITED GRAFTING OF WESTERN "LEARNING" ONTO THE CHINESE BODY POLITIC. THIS FORMULA, THE SO-CALLED "TI-YONG" HYPOTHESIS, SEEKS TO PRESERVE THE CHINESE "ESSENCE" WHILE ABSORBING THE FRUITS OF WESTERN LEARNING. WE NOTE, TOO, THAT THE STUDENTS' NEW VERSION OF THE OLD SLOGAN, XIXUE WEI TI, ZHONGZUE WEI YONG, CAN ALSO BE READ AS A SATIRE OF DENG'S SLOGAN "SOCIALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS"--CREATING A WESTERNIZED SOCIETY WITH A CHINESE OVERLAY. END COMMENT.)

GOVERNMENT REACTION

8. ALTHOUGH THERE IS STILL SOME AGITATION ON BEIJING CAMPUSES, ESPECIALLY QINGHUA UNIVERSITY, THE CITY AUTHORITIES APPEAR TO HAVE THE SITUATION WELL IN HAND. ALL BEIJING PAPERS REPUBLISHED THE DECEMBER 25 PEOPLE'S DAILY COMMENTARY (SEE SEPTTEL) LAUDING THE STUDENTS'

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OBJECTIVE OF ATTAINING GREATER DEMOCRACY BUT WARNING AGAINST FURTHER DISRUPTIVE ACTIVITIES. CENTRAL CHINESE TELEVISION AND BEIJING RADIO HAVE REPEATEDLY BROADCAST THE CONTENTS OF THIS AND OTHER COMMENTARIES CALLING FOR STUDENTS TO STAY OUT OF THE STREETS. A VARIETY OF CULTURAL ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN ORGANIZED TO ABSORB THE ATTENTION OF STUDENTS. WE SEE LITTLE PROSPECT OF DEMONSTRATIONS HERE APPROACHING THE SIZE OF THOSE IN SHANGHAI.

DECLINING ACTIVISM IN 1986

9. ON THE CONTRARY, POLITICAL ACTIVITY AT BEIJING UNIVERSITY AND OTHER BEIJING CAMPUSES HAS SUBSIDED CONSIDERABLY SINCE THE ANTI-JAPANESE DEMONSTRATIONS IN MID-SEPTEMBER 1985. ACCORDING TO A GRADUATE STUDENT WHO SAID HE PARTICIPATED ACTIVELY IN THE DEMONSTRATIONS LAST YEAR, CAMPUS AND MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES HAVE WORKED HARD SINCE THEN TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS SHIFTED THEIR ATTENTION AWAY FROM POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. SENIOR OFFICIALS LIKE BEIJING DEPUTY MAYOR CHEN HAOSU, WHO LIVES ON THE BEIJING UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, HAVE MET REPEATEDLY WITH OLDER STUDENTS DESTINED FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICE TO CONVINCE THEM THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO MEET THEIR DEMANDS FOR GREATER POLITICAL FREEDOM AND BETTER LIVING CONDITIONS. CHEN ENCOURAGED THESE STUDENTS TO COUNSEL OTHERS NOT TO GET INVOLVED IN OVERT POLITICAL DISSENT.

10. AT THE SAME TIME, CAMPUS AUTHORITIES HAVE EXERTED MORE PRESSURE ON STUDENT ACTIVISTS. A STUDENT TOLD EMBOFF THAT TWO STUDENTS WHO ADVOCATED ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL PARTY LAST FALL, FOR INSTANCE,

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WERE ARRESTED AND CHARGED AS "COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARIES"--
AN ACCUSATION WHICH, EVEN IF NOT FULLY PROSECUTED, WILL
MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE STUDENTS TO PURSUE MEANINGFUL
CAREERS. OTHERS HAVE BEEN WARNED THAT FURTHER
POLITICAL ACTIVISM WILL PRECLUDE THEM FROM GOOD JOB
ASSIGNMENTS OR EVEN FROM GRADUATING. THE UNIVERSITY
ADMINISTRATION HAS ALSO STEPPED UP PROPAGANDA ACTIVITIES.
ACCORDING TO ONE STUDENT, AFTER THE ANTI-JAPANESE
DEMONSTRATIONS LAST YEAR, THE ADMINISTRATION ORGANIZED
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"POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL" WORK TEAMS TO STUDY AND
CATEGORIZE ALL WALL POSTERS PUT UP DURING THE DEMONSTRATIONS,
AND TO IDENTIFY THOSE STUDENTS WHO HAVE "THOUGHT PROBLEMS."
THE RESULTS WERE LATER DISSEMINATED AS GUIDANCE TO THE WORKERS
FOR USE IN MEETINGS WITH STUDENTS

STUDENT ANGER REMAINS

11. DESPITE ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS, SOME STUDENTS DO
CONTINUE TO MEET REGULARLY IN SMALL GROUPS TO DISCUSS
POLITICAL ISSUES, ACCORDING TO ONE STUDENT. THIS
STUDENT ASSERTED THAT STUDENTS WERE DISMAYED BY THE

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GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO FULFILL PROMISES MADE FOLLOWING LAST YEAR'S DEMONSTRATIONS, AND HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY CYNICAL ABOUT THE REGIME'S PROMISES OF GREATER FREEDOM AND POLITICAL REFORM. THERE IS A GROUNDSWELL OF ANGER AND BITTERNESS AT BEIJING UNIVERSITY, THE STUDENT SAID, THAT COULD SPARK LARGER, MORE CONFRONTATIONAL DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE FUTURE. THE STUDENT REMARKED ACERBICALLY THAT THE PARTY'S NOTION OF "DEMOCRACY" IS NOTHING MORE THAN A GLOSS BENEATH WHICH A HARSH, AUTHORITARIAN BUREAUCRACY CONTINUES TO OPERATE AS IT HAS IN THE PAST. NOTHING HAS REALLY CHANGED SINCE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, HE SAID.

12. COMMENT: THE REGIME HAS HANDLED POTENTIALLY SERIOUS STUDENT UNREST IN BEIJING WITH SOPHISTICATION. WHILE TOLERATING SOME STUDENT DISSENT, OFFICIALS HAVE QUIETLY TIGHTENED CONTROLS AND WARNED ACTIVISTS THAT FURTHER DEMONSTRATIONS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. THE LEADERSHIP HAS NONETHELESS EXPRESSED ITS SUPPORT FOR THE STUDENTS' FUNDAMENTAL GOALS, ESPECIALLY GREATER
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DEMOCRATIZATION OF CHINESE SOCIETY. RATHER THAN SILENCING DISSENT, CHINESE LEADERS' APPROACH HAS BEEN TO CAUTION STUDENT ACTIVISTS NOT TO PLACE DEMANDS ON THE SYSTEM THAT IT CANNOT BEAR. SENIOR REFORM OFFICIALS WANT TO AVOID PROVOKING A CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH THAT WOULD SET BACK THE LARGELY SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS OF THE PAST YEAR TO REMOVE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL STRICTURES ON THE ARTS AND FREER EXPRESSION IN GENERAL. THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS MAY GREATLY COMPLICATE EFFORTS BY SENIOR REFORMERS TO PUSH FOR MORE POLITICAL REFORMS NEXT YEAR. AT A MINIMUM, THE DEMONSTRATIONS MAY EXPOSE SENIOR REFORMERS--LIKE HU YAOPANG AND SECRETARIAT MEMBER HU QILI--TO CONSERVATIVE CRITICISM THAT THE REFORMS INCREASE SOCIAL INDISCIPLINE AND INSTABILITY.

13. AT THE SAME TIME, THE BITTERNESS OF THE STUDENTS INTERVIEWED POINTS AT SOME OF THE LONGER-TERM PROBLEMS RAISED BY REFORM. YOUNG INTELLECTUALS, WHO SUPPORT THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP AND THE REFORM PROGRAM, ARE DISMAYED BY THE RELATIVELY SLOW PACE OF REFORM AND THE ABILITY OF THE MIDDLE-LEVELS OF CHINA'S BLOATED BUREAUCRACY TO BLOCK REFORM INITIATIVES. THEY WANT RAPID--AND PROBABLY IN THE SHORT-TERM UNACHIEVABLE--IMPROVEMENTS IN THEIR PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS AND IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT. SOME APPEAR TO ENVISION ADOPTION OF "DEMOCRACY" OR WESTERN POLITICAL PLURALISM AS A CURE-ALL FOR THE MANY ILLS OF CHINESE SOCIETY.

14. STUDENT IMPATIENCE WITH THE SLOW PACE OF REFORM IS

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ALSO A RESULT OF INFLATED EXPECTATIONS THAT ARE
ENCOURAGED BY THE CURRENT HIGH LEVEL OF MEDIA EXPOSURE
TO THE MORE ABUNDANT AND FREE LIFESTYLES OF THE WEST
AND JAPAN. STUDENTS ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE "LOOK
BUT DON'T TOUCH" ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WEST HELD BY

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MIDDLE-LEVEL OFFICIALS. THE STUDENTS SHARE A GREAT
YEARNING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE WEST (ESPECIALLY
THE UNITED STATES) AND A STRONG DESIRE FOR CHINA TO

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TURN MORE TOWARD THE WEST. IF SUSTAINED, THESE STUDENTS
MAY ONE DAY BE INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING TO FRUITION
THE MORE RADICAL AIMS OF THE CURRENT REFORM PROGRAM.
THE LEADERSHIP FACES THE POSSIBILITY, HOWEVER, IF IT IS
UNABLE TO HANDLE THE EXPECTATIONS OF YOUNG INTELLECTUALS,
THAT IT WILL LOSE THEIR SUPPORT OVER THE LONG-RUN.
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